

Remarks by Ambassador Harry K. Thomas, Jr.
Congressional Internship Program for Young Mindanao Leaders Completion
Ceremony, 10th Group
House of Representatives
7 December 2010

Acknowledgements:

- Honorable Feliciano Belmonte Sr., Speaker of the House of Representatives
- Honorable Sec. Luwalhati Antonino, Chairperson, Mindanao Development Authority
- Atty. Marilyn B. Yap, Secretary-General of the House of Representatives
- Members of Congress and the Secretariat
- Dr. Macapado A. Muslim, President of Mindanao State University-Marawi
- Graduating Interns
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Mabuhay! Assalamu Alaikum! Good afternoon! It is a pleasure to be here to celebrate this occasion with some of Mindanao's bright and promising young people. This is your day and I thank you for inviting me to share it with you.

The Congressional Internship Program for Young Mindanao Leaders (CIPYML) is unique in many respects. The program is the outcome of a partnership between the Philippine and the U.S. Governments, and it is the only program in the Philippines that provides highly-motivated, dynamic young people from Mindanao with the opportunity to immerse themselves in policy formulation and legislation.

The CIPYML has now spanned the tenure of three Speakers of the House of Representatives and three U.S. Ambassadors. This demonstrates that the program is making a real contribution to strengthening awareness of and respect for democratic procedure. Working with bright and articulate young people like you also presents Members of Congress with a valuable way to learn more about the concerns and aspirations of some of Mindanao's historically marginalized groups.

As you may know, the Congress of the United States also runs an internship program. Like the CIPYML, it provides committed, intelligent young people with

opportunities to observe the wheels of government first-hand. Both the Philippine House of Representatives and the U.S. Congress share a belief in the importance of providing experiences that help their young people to understand – in a way that their textbooks and university classes cannot express – how the institutions of democratic governance really work, how policies are formulated, how laws are enacted, and how compromises must be made among and between people with differing points of view.

The U.S. Government is committed to working with the Government of the Philippines, with provincial and local governments, with the private sector, and with the people of Mindanao to accelerate development and to help sustain and broaden peace in the region. The programs and projects on which we work with our partners in Mindanao are continuing and expanding. We are strong in our commitment to help create additional opportunities for Mindanao's young people, who are its most important resource.

My warmest congratulations to the 24 rising stars seated before me who comprise the 10th group of interns to complete this challenging program. All of you here are among the best and the brightest that Mindanao has to offer. Mindanao needs people like you who have the talent, perseverance, dedication to hard work, and training to move forward. The Philippines needs you. As Dr. Rizal once wrote, "*Ang kabataan ang pag asa ng bayan.*"

You will, over the next few days, return to your families and friends in Mindanao. The insights and knowledge gained over the last four months will travel with you. I look forward to hearing of your accomplishments over the next several years, as you apply what you have learned. I am confident that you will all make significant contributions to the further development of Mindanao and the wider Philippines.

Thank you, Speaker Belmonte and members of the Philippine House of Representatives, for continuing to support this wonderful program.

I again congratulate all of the interns for your hard work and your success. You have now become part of the CIPYML tradition of excellence, and I wish you the best of luck in your future endeavors.

Magandang hapon at maraming salamat.